

Good morning and welcome. My name is Annalisa Segal, I am 12 yrs old, and attend DePaolo Middle School in Southington where I am in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

I came to speak to you about being born premature in hopes that you will agree with me that the March of Dimes is a wonderful organization and without them I may not have turned out as healthy as I am.

Born at 31 weeks, weighing only 3lbs 1/2oz and 16 ½ inches long, I WAS tiny. My mom has nicknamed me chicken because she says that's what I looked like when I was born! Now of course I don't remember what my birth or infancy was like, but I have plenty of pictures, videos and family members to remind me. Would you believe that my dad's wedding band fit over my hand and up my arm! We have pictures! And my very first hand print fit on a gift tag - that's how small I was.

It took me a long time to realize just how small I was, when I look at the pictures and videos and I see full term babies now, I cannot believe the difference! I can't believe that babies are born that small and even smaller yet live and can grow up to be healthy. Thanks to the March of Dimes we are growing up and staying healthy. Their tireless research helped both me and my mom. My mom had something called toxemia/pre-eclampsia in

normal words it was really high blood pressure and she was becoming ill. Her doctor knew this and gave her some shots so when I was born early my lungs would be okay. It helped some but not enough and I still needed a tube down my throat and special medicine-called Surfactant was given to me to keep my lungs from sticking together so I could breathe. Both of these medications are due to the research the March of Dimes has continuously done.

I spent 6  $\frac{1}{2}$  weeks in the Newborn Special Care Unit of Yale New Haven Hospital, my first Easter was there!

My mom has told me some stories of people trying to be helpful by saying, "well at least she came home before her due date so you've had her longer, or well think how lucky you are - you can sleep through the night the first few weeks." If you haven't had a premature baby you just can't understand how off base remarks like that are. And please remember this story in case any of your family or friends do have a premature baby. My mom cried everytime she had to leave me at the hospital. She gladly would've taken sleepless nights. Yes, I survived and am overall healthy but it has taken a lot to get me where I am today. So I am here because I want to tell people about the March of Dimes and the great work they do, I want to thank them for helping me to

survive and have the best chances at being healthy. I am in my third year working with the March of Dimes to give back for the part they played in me and my family's lives.

I have had moderate reflux most of my life, much worse as an infant. I have asthma which I've had for almost 12 years but it is better than when I was younger. I had physical therapy as an infant and toddler but I am proud to say now, that I am a competitive dancer, cheerleader, high honors student and recently crowned Greater Waterbury's Outstanding Pre-Teen 2009, as part of the Miss Connecticut Organization.

I am here to convince you to **please** add Cystic Fibrosis to newborn screening exams, when this opportunity came to speak today my mom told me about when I was screened for Cystic Fibrosis. It was after I wasn't growing, I was eating poorly, had severe reflux and respiratory problems I was over 1 years old! Fortunately for me and my family the test was negative, but what if it wasn't? What if it was positive and I could have been treated from day one, I believe that my overall chances would have to be better. So please understand that early detection and treatment is best for survival for newborns with Cystic Fibrosis. My mom was my biggest advocate as an infant, whether it was speech and hearing concerns, respiratory issues, allergies or any other

concerns, she was there fighting for me. Don't we want that for all newborns, not all newborns have someone like my mom, but they do have YOU. You can help speak on their behalf by insuring their health in Connecticut and mandating that ALL newborns be screened and adding Cystic Fibrosis to that screening.

Thank you for listening to my story and agreeing that we need to end prematurity and continue our fight for all newborns making their health our number one priority so other families do not have to go through what me and my family did.

THANK YOU!